

5,000 Gays, Lesbians Congregate At Living Sober '89 Convention

by Allen White

The extraordinary world of Living Sober '89 took place last weekend at the Civic Auditorium. More than 5,000 gay men and lesbians, all recovering alcoholics, were there to attend workshops, dance to the music of City Swing, be together and to celebrate being clean and sober.

Susan, the chair of the conference, said, "It is such a rush to stand up on the stage and see over 5,000 people and know they are all happy and they are having a good time and you are helping people. It is changing their lives."

What makes this particular event special, she said, is "This program offers hope. Usually, when people come into the program their lives are pretty fucked up in one way or another and this is a way out, a way for them to change. There is a lot of love and a lot of high energy knowing that we have all been in the same place and we have all come through. We are struggling with the same issues."

The issue basically is alcoholism and those attending the conference are committed to changing their lives. Living Sober is Alcoholics Anonymous for gay men and lesbians. Some of those attending have been sober for years. Others come to the conference to become clean and sober.

The conference is national in scope, and there are people from all over the country.

One man from San Diego said, "This is my first time. It's really great."

He says he has been clean and sober for seven days. He heard about it from two friends.

"They thought it was just the thing to bolster what I am going through right now," he said.

Another person attending the conference said, "I had to move to Sacramento when I found out I had AIDS, from a little town outside of Chico."

Looking at the thousands of people in the Civic Auditorium he said, "Being around this many men in recovery is really great for me."

He said he had heard about the conference in previous years but, "I have never had the time until I became unemployable. It is an answer but only for people who are alcoholics."

"I think it's wonderful, it's a very loving place," a woman from Encino said. "They have taken a lot of time and effort putting this together. It just feels good."

She spoke of the emotions that take place as people attend the many workshops.

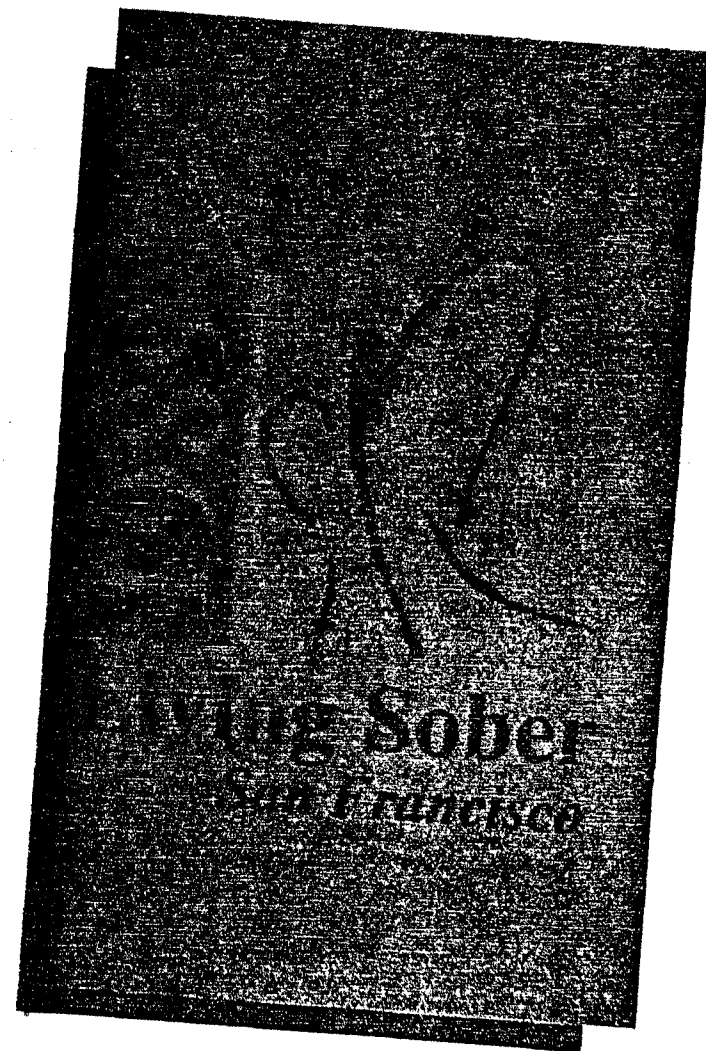
"There is so much en-

thusiasm. The quality of love, the kind of healing that can go on between people with each other. We have a hard time sometimes going to things like incest or child abuse workshops. You will see somebody in the halls who is crying and there is somebody holding them. There is that kind of care given, even to people you don't know. What really strikes me about this conference is that there are so many people, yet there is this calm."

There were literally thousands of gay men and lesbians in the building throughout the day and most of the night. There was a feeling, a sense of inner peace, that many described as spiritual.

A woman from Cupertino could understand the meaning of the conference by "walking through the halls and seeing all the people who have supported me all through my life are here."

For her, "One thing that is really significant is I just graduated from college. I started going to college when I got sober three and a half years ago. I tried many times, but I got through it this time. I did it because I had support from the gay, sober population. It is following a path and the people who are there with you. The steps give you the ways to find the absolute truth. That is the side benefit from being sober."



"It is an incredible experience of community," she continued. "In the San Jose area there is a real wonderful gay, sober community. Here I find I am with my whole community. It is a real miracle to see so many gay people who are sober and want to find the truth in their life and want quality."

"I used to come to San Fran-

cisco and get real loaded. I used to walk the streets and not even know who I was or where I was going and even caring. It is so different to go out with friends and have a good time and know you don't need drugs or alcohol to do it." As she finished her comments she joined three other friends and they went out to go dancing and to celebrate. ▼